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THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

FREDERICK L. MORIARTY, S.J.



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by

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(With Study-Club Questions)



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Introduction

Our hopes are usually best understood in their fulfillment. In some cases the fulfillment totally surpasses anything we might have longed for and then we discover that the preparation or expectation told only half the story—and not too well at that. If there was ever a case in which realization outstripped anticipation, it is found in Christ's fulfillment of Israel's Messianic hope. The Old Testament tells the story of a divinely directed process by which there was awakened a longing for a Messianic deliverer. But at no stage of the preparation did any Israelite adequately understand or even suspect the full meaning of the divine plan—that God's own Son would become man to die and rise for our salvation.

In underlining this necessary distinction between preparation and fulfillment we have no intention of minimizing the unique value of the Old Testament for Christians. As a record of God's actions with Israel the Old Testament moves inexorably to the climax of salvation-history which is Christ. The word was spoken in fragmentary utterances by prophet, priest and wise man; and having heard these words the question came naturally to the lips of anyone whose spiritual life had been nourished on the revelation of the Old Testament: When will God speak His final, definitive word to us?

St. John answers this in the Prologue to the Gospel when he sums up the whole process of God's self-revelation to us with the good news that the Word Himself became flesh and dwelt

among us. History could be seen as extending from the word first spoken in creation to the word made flesh. It does not seem necessary to insist on the newness, the utter uniqueness of this fulfillment of what had been prepared over the long centuries of waiting and hoping. Only in the radiance of the Light come into the world would the broken light of Old Testament prophecy fall into place.

The Incarnation was a fulfillment which an Isaiah or a Jeremiah would not have denied but, in claiming that they did not foresee this outcome in all its overpowering glory, we do them no disservice. For the vision of the ancient prophets, however magnificent, was a limited vision, a partial understanding of Him who completed and transformed the hopes of Israel. We who live in the era of realized hopes insist on being taken seriously when we speak of a *New Testament*. For Jesus, in fulfilling the promises, has given them a new and richer meaning, in which their original sense is neither denied nor set aside but caught up into something more comprehensive and far-reaching than could ever have been imagined before He came. This becomes especially clear and vivid when we read the early sermons of Peter as they are found in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

The coming of the Holy Spirit had left Peter a changed man. Now he came forward and boldly proclaimed to a cross-section of the Jewish world that the ancient promises had been fulfilled in the Man they had put to death: "Therefore the whole house of Israel must recognize for certain that Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Lord and Messiah appointed by God" (Acts 2, 36). Peter does not repudiate the sacred history of his people; but now he understands the meaning of that history in the light of the goal toward which it was always pointing. What was the basis of this hope that sustained the people of Israel and what were the forms it took during the course of Israel's long encounter with her God? These are the questions we must try to answer if we would understand the time of preparation which, while it did not give us a clear preview of Christ, provided the context in which His coming could be understood.

Basis of the Messianic Hope

Israel differed from the surrounding nations in her faith in a God who controlled both nature and history. With this faith came the conviction that there was a divine plan being worked out in the world and that Israel had a most important part to play in the achievement of that plan. Events were never seen as the working of some blind fate, without direction or purpose. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the Lord of history and He made history serve His purposes. This is the mystery of salvation, and Israel was very conscious of a special part in that mystery. Not through her own virtue but by the free election of Yahweh, Israel would be the first to enjoy the blessings of salvation. Israel, in turn, would be the means of bringing salvation to the rest of the world. This conviction is the bedrock of Israel's hope. One of the earliest and clearest expressions of that faith may be seen in the description of Abraham's vocation to found a new people. Israel's hope was rooted in the mystery of her Father's election.

Now Yahweh said to Abram:
"Leave your country, your kinsfolk
and your father's house,
for a land that I will show you;
and I will make a great nation of you.
I will bless you. and make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and curse those who curse you.
In you all the families of the earth
shall be blessed" (Genesis 12, 1-3).

But God's plan of salvation did not take its absolute beginning with Abraham. In the call of Abraham we find, indeed, a fresh start, a certain beginning in time and space of salvation-history. St. Paul insists on this more than once when he writes about Abraham's place in the divine plan. But the divine will to save, as it has been revealed in the Old Testament, is pushed back to

the very beginning, to the first rejection of the divine goodness by the sin of Adam in which all of us are implicated.

Man rejected out of hand God's invitation to intimate union with Himself. But the divine intention was not irreparably frustrated for the theologian has seen in Genesis 3, 15 the first hint of the good news about our salvation. A new humanity would be created in Christ, the second Adam. In the Genesis text we have, it is true, only a hint of the victory over sin and we must not make the obscure text bear a weight greater than that intended by the author. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to ignore this first shaft of light that brightens up the somber narrative of man's Fall. Nor may one forget that the promise of victory made to the "seed of the woman" is not a haphazard and trivial detail inserted in Israel's earliest comprehensive history (the Yahwist national epic) but an important link in the historian's understanding of the relation between God and man.

With the promise we have just described as a background, the call of Abraham fits into the pattern of the Messianic plan and rings up the curtain on the great religious drama of Israel and humanity. Forces are here and now set in motion which would lead to a reversal of Satan's first victory over mankind.

The opening verses of the narrative describing Abraham's call strike a note that is very characteristic of the Patriarch's story—the trial of faith. There is intentional pathos in the lingering description of the things he is to leave—land, kindred, father's house. And how much they meant to a Semite! What made Abraham great and acceptable to God was his unquestioning and loving obedience under such conditions. Faith was the leitmotif of Abraham's life of service; he trusted God against all appearances, believing beyond all human hope that God, in His own good time, would open up the way to fulfill what He had promised. The call of Abraham is a foundation stone of the Messianic hope. With Abraham's magnificent response of faith the spiritual pilgrimage of Israel began; this economy of grace would attain its goal in the death and resurrection of the Messiah in whom the promises would be fulfilled.

Several centuries after Abraham, in the age dominated by the majestic figure of Moses, God would again act in Israel's history. This time, the nation, instead of an individual, holds the center of attention. In fact, the divine interventions would bring about the very existence of a nation forever bound to Yahweh who had delivered her from bondage in Egypt. From that time her true freedom would consist in being His servants. "For the people of Israel belong to Me as servants; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God" (Leviticus 25, 55).

It is unnecessary to dwell on the importance of the Exodus for Israel. Lawgiver, prophet, priest, wise man and historian recall again and again the central place this event has in the very understanding of Israel's existence. Year in and year out, at the Feast of the Pasch, the people solemnly commemorated in their liturgy the deliverance from Egypt. More than any other single factor, the Exodus makes understandable the perduring hope that is characteristic of Israel's sacred literature.

The Old Testament writers are men who looked both backward and forward. The Exodus had so indelibly stamped itself upon the national consciousness that neither historian nor psalmist could ignore it even though the event had taken place centuries before. This explains the Hebrew fondness for recalling the past; it not only explained the present but provided the only hope for the future.

To put it another way, we might say that Israel lived by two articles of faith, both of which help to explain that hope which sustained Israel during her long and troubled history. These were: (1) that God had intervened in her past, not once but many times, and, above all, in the decisive event of the Exodus; and (2) that God would intervene again at a time of His own choosing.

Between these two comings, Israel lived and hoped. The Christian likewise lives between two comings, the Incarnation and the Second Coming (*Parousia*) between which he lives and

hopes as a member of a covenanted society, the New Israel. It is important, therefore, to understand the decisive role played by the Exodus in providing a sure foundation for Israel's hope. In virtue of that event, comprising both Exodus and Covenant on Sinai, history is seen as dominated by the sovereign will of God. It is time now to look at some of the forms which this hope took in the course of Israel's history.

The Forms of Israelite Hope

We are accustomed to identify the hope of Israel with the coming of the Messiah. This is not altogether accurate since the Hebrews could and often did conceive of God intervening to save them without there being any question of a personal Messiah participating in the work of salvation. In the Hebrew view salvation was due to Yahweh and this could be achieved with or without a Messiah.

The word Messiah means "anointed" (in Greek it is *Christos*) and was used of kings and priests since their office called for a special anointing or consecration that set them apart from ordinary men. Eventually the word Messiah was used in a highly specialized and technical sense to designate the one who, as the anointed representative of Yahweh, would usher in the Messianic age. It often comes as a surprise to learn that the title, thus understood, does not occur in the Old Testament; only in later Judaism and, of course, in Christianity, do we find the word Messiah used as the proper title of the divine agent through whose coming the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice would be inaugurated.

The Messianic hope is quite complex and, in the course of Israel's history, took various forms. Oversimplification, or the temptation to see the whole question in black and white, will prove no more helpful here than it has elsewhere in solving complex biblical problems. The Messianic hope, we might add, was also open to misinterpretation and misuse. False messiahs have not been wanting in history, and they warn us against the danger-

ous uses to which this hope may be perverted. This may, in some way, explain the reserved and often perplexing attitude of our Lord to the title of Messiah. For here is the Person who finally brought to fulfillment a hope that extended over two thousand years, and yet He consistently avoided using the title and even forbade the disciples to say anything about His Messianic office. While Jesus never repudiated His Messianic vocation, the title Messiah was not the one by which He wanted to be known during His lifetime.

There are a number of good reasons for this reticence; in general we can say that His idea of the Messianic office differed so completely from that of His contemporaries that He chose to forego the title during His public life. In point of fact *no* title was adequate to describe the work for which the Father had sent Him.

We should also point out another distinction between the Hebrew and Christian understanding of the word Messiah. The Hebrews did not identify the Messiah with Yahweh, the God of Israel; he was the anointed representative of Yahweh. The Christian, in applying the title to Jesus, confesses that He is also a divine Person. The Messiah who redeems is God and only by union with Him do we share the blessings of the Messianic era inaugurated with His coming.

A final word might be said about our method of dealing with the Messianic teaching of the Old Testament. We should not restrict our investigation to individual texts that are presumed to give a kind of preview of Jesus. It is not true to say, as some have, that His biography was written before He was born. Such a method of handling the Messianic teaching of the Old Testament fails because it refuses to respect the imperfect and provisional character of this revelation. These individual prophecies, which have been handily collected in many of our textbooks, are, we must never forget, a point of departure and not an arrival. They point us, to some extent, in the direction of Christ but they do not describe Him so clearly and unmistakably that all we

need do is read the prophecies to find Christ fully present in the Old Testament.

The method also fails because it refuses to respect the gradual manner in which God prepared Israel for the overwhelming reality of Christ. In its search for precision and neat mathematical equation between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, the method fails to discern the time of God's patient waiting and His slow, often painful, task of educating His people by couching the hope of the future in forms that would be meaningful for the present.

God saw that hope needed to be kept alive here and now in Israel and, for this reason, the description of the Messianic age necessarily took on much of the coloring of Israel's institutions and aspirations. The divine pedagogy is beautifully summed up in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

When in times past God spoke to our fathers, He spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion by the prophets, but in this the final age He has spoken to us by His Son whom He has made heir of the whole universe. . . . (Hebrews 1, 1-2).

Biblical study of recent years has set the Messianic hope in a far better perspective, and we now realize the breadth of that hope and its pervasive influence on the sacred literature of Israel. We have learned to see that the entire Old Testament is, in a real sense, Messianic inasmuch as it tells the story of a people continually guided by God toward a destiny it never fully comprehended. Israel indeed had her ideals and aspirations but they were to find definitive realization and transformation in Him whose life, atoning death and resurrection was the final lesson in God's education of mankind so desperately in need of salvation. In Jesus, God's final word was spoken. With these cautions we may now take up a few of the Messianic themes in the Old Testament, examine them within the framework of Israel's vast hope, and relate them to the Person of Jesus who has brought them to completion.

The Day of Yahweh

We meet this theme for the first time in the prophecy of Amos (eighth century B.C.) who gave it an interpretation which shocked the complacent people of Israel gathered about the famous shrine at Bethel. There is no sure way to decide just when this idea of a Day of Yahweh first took root in Israel nor the circumstances which led to this belief. Recent studies lead us to think that the concept is very old and even goes back as far as the election of Israel as God's people during the time of Moses. More specifically, it seems that the idea can be traced to early traditions about Yahweh who does battle for His people.

One tantalizing reference to a work now lost, the "Book of the Wars of Yahweh" (Numbers 21, 14), suggests that the Israelites once possessed a history of the battles in which Yahweh fought for His people in order that they might conquer their enemies and possess the Promised Land. As early as the Song of Deborah, in the fifth chapter of Judges, we see the role played by Yahweh, the warrior, in the victory over the Canaanite enemy. The same belief is professed again and again during the stormy period of the Judges. What we meet here is the conviction that Yahweh Himself fought for His people and made their cause His own. The Day of Yahweh was therefore an irruption of God into history, bringing victory to Israel and defeat to a terror-stricken foe.

The Israelites at Bethel, during the time of Amos, seized upon this idea of a great victory over their enemies, without giving the slightest heed to the moral and religious demands made on them by Yahweh. He was on their side, so what else mattered? Enough to wait for that imminent, divine break-through and, in the meantime, offer up the sacrifices they believed Yahweh demanded of them. The moral demands of a covenanted people were conveniently forgotten. The prophet Amos, a fearlessly honest man, struck at the foundations of this fallacious belief:

Woe to you who desire the Day of Yahweh!
Why should you have the Day of Yahweh?
It is darkness and not light;

as if a man fled from a lion
and a bear met him;
or entered a house and rested
his hand against the wall,
and a serpent bit him.
Is not the Day of Yahweh darkness,
and not light,
and gloom, without any brightness? (Amos 5, 18-20)

Yes, the Day was coming but it was to be a day of wrath. If the self-deceived people were unwilling to face up to the truth that God cannot be indifferent to wickedness, then Amos would tell them in the plainest language that Yahweh was turning this Day into one of judgment rather than one of easy victory and security.

Amos gave to the concept of the Day of Yahweh a moral quality and thus saved it from becoming a deceptive slogan blinding men to impending judgment. Before the idea of the Day of Yahweh could become an effective Messianic theme it had to be purified of any false notions which popular fancy had attached to it. If we say that Amos, in this passage and elsewhere, gives us a Messianism of judgment, we do not mean to take away anything from the Messianic character of his prophecy. The coming of the Messiah could be said to be prepared in the frightening words announcing divine judgment as well as in the brighter promises of future blessings.

In the prophet Joel, who comes later than Amos, the Day of Yahweh appears again as a time of judgment and it is described in the vivid imagery of an alarm sounded to warn the people of approaching catastrophe.

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the world tremble,
for the Day of Yahweh is coming,
yea, it is near at hand.
It is a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness . . . (Joel 2, 1-2a).

But Joel's message is not exclusively one of divine judgment. His vision of the Day of Yahweh as a time of blessing has been given a New Testament relevance by the use Peter made of this prophecy at Pentecost.

And it shall come to pass in the last days,
that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and daughters shall prophesy,
and your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Upon servants and handmaids will I pour
out my spirit in those days (Joel 2, 28-29).

Note carefully that Peter's citation of this prophecy from Joel is neither haphazard nor arbitrary. In the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, Peter saw the beginning of a new age, the inauguration of the Messianic reign, marking the end of the former times and the culmination of God's work in history. The full force of the ancient prophecy and its Messianic overtones become clear to men only when they are confronted with the apostolic sermon announcing that the words of Joel describing God's saving work had attained realization in Jesus of Nazareth.

The prophet we call Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40—55), living after the collapse of national independence in 587 B.C., strengthened his dejected countrymen with a similar optimistic picture of that Day. While the actual phrase rarely appears in his writings, the vibrant hope of the prophet's message grows out of his vision of an era of peace and blessedness coming after Israel's servitude in Babylon had ended. Deliverance and redemption are the key-notes of Second Isaiah's tender message of comfort to the exiles in Babylon.

Fear not, for you will not be put to shame;
blush not, for you will not be disgraced.
For you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood
you will no longer remember.

For your husband is your maker;
Yahweh of hosts is his name;
and your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,
God of the whole earth he is called.
For Yahweh has called you back
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a young wife when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will
take you back.
In an outburst of wrath, for a moment
I hid my face from you;
but with everlasting love
I will have compassion on you,
says Yahweh, your redeemer (Isaiah 54, 4-8).

We call the prophecies of Second Isaiah the "Book of Consolation" since they were meant to give fresh strength and hope to a people that had suffered the overwhelming experience of total defeat and exile. What commands our attention in these oracles is the prophet's repeated insistence that the coming era of salvation would be the work of Yahweh Himself and not of man. Israel had tired of human schemes and of hopes that had no basis other than the blundering efforts of man. Whatever future she had lay in God's hands, and He was Israel's spouse. Time and again the prophet, sometimes in plain and literal language and other times in beautiful poetic figures, returned to the theme that Yahweh would personally smooth out all obstacles and make straight the way back to the land promised to the Fathers of Israel.

Whenever the prophets expressed the Messianic hope in terms of the Day of Yahweh, they understood it as fundamentally a religious (and not political or material) event, despite their use of imagery that might superficially suggest an era of material blessings alone. The prophets could not convey their meaning to the people except in language reflecting the political and social

world of that time; a man who intends to be heard must adapt his message to contemporary thought patterns and imagery.

But whatever the adaptations to the circumstances of that time, the prophets did not see the Messianic age as something brought in by political or economic factors. This was the work of Yahweh, whose will would, in that age, become the norm and motive of man's action. It was to be an age permeated with the spirit of Yahweh; peace and justice, the age-old ideal of prosperity in the ancient world, would prevail.

The inscription on the entrance of the United Nations building in New York is found identically in the writings of two prophets, Isaiah and Micah. It expresses beautifully, in imagery thoroughly at home in the ancient Near East, the era of peace for which men longed, then, as they do now. But it is not enough to hate war; nations, like individuals, must hate the evil that causes war and submit their own ambitions to the sovereign will of God.

And he will judge between the nations
and will decide for many peoples;
and they will beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not brandish sword against nation,
and they shall not learn war any more.

(Isaiah 2, 4; Micah 4, 3)

The Messianic King

We have noted that the Messianic hope pointed to a time when Yahweh would again intervene in history in order to establish His kingdom. It would not be surprising, then, that the idea of the king played a large part in shaping that hope. Eventually the ideal of the Davidic king who would inaugurate the reign of God became the most pervasive and enduring form of Israel's hope. History gives the reason. This form of Messianism took its rise from the divine promise made to David's house during the lifetime of the great king.

The prophet Nathan announced an eternal covenant between Yahweh and the throne of David. This covenant tended to absorb the ancient Mosaic covenant between Israel and Yahweh, though it should not be thought that the Mosaic covenant was thereby annulled. Israel was to live under both.

In the divine oracle pronounced by Nathan a twofold promise to David's house should be clearly noted: (1) the Davidic son who succeeded to royal power would stand in a unique father-son relationship to Yahweh, and (2) the dynasty would be established forever. Even if the royal descendant of David should be a sinner, the eternity of the dynasty would not be cancelled out. These are the words of Nathan announcing the divine promise to David:

When your days are ended,
and you sleep with your fathers,
I will raise up your seed after you,
the issue of your own body,
and I will establish his kingship.
He will build a house for my name,
and I will establish the throne
of his kingship forever.
I will be to him a father,
and he a son to me;
if he acts wickedly
I will chastise him with the rod of men,
with blows given by the sons of men.
Yet my covenant-love I will not take from him,
as I took it from Saul, before you.
Your house and your kingship shall
be made sure forever before me,
your throne shall be established forever.

(2 Samuel 7, 12-16)

From this time it was inevitable that the Messianic hope should be joined to the notion of kingdom and to the king who would reign on the throne of David. In view of this it is interesting to observe that the Israelite historians, with their charac-

teristic frankness, stated that the successors of David were not faithful to their calling and privilege. It makes an interesting exercise to examine the historical record and count the number of those who were judged worthy of their great ancestor, David, founder of the dynasty. Yet, Yahweh would not go back on His word.

Among the great prophets, whose profound insights teach us so much about the way of God, Isaiah stands out as the messenger of the Messianic hope as it was shaped by the eternal covenant with David's house. Taking as his point of departure the rule of David, whose memory was somewhat idealized after two centuries had softened some of its harsher lines, he pictured the Messianic era in terms that even the most optimistic could hardly expect to see fulfilled in any historical king of David's line. The dismal record was there to temper extravagant hopes; but the ideal, which depended on God rather than man, remained intact. For this reason, each succeeding king, however unworthy a descendant of the great David, was the representative of the dynasty, the heir of the covenant promises and the visible bearer of the Messianic hope of the future.

The best known Messianic prophecies of Isaiah are found in chapters 7 to 11 of his book and they center around the figure of Emmanuel, "God with us." The oracle in chapter 9 develops what was said of the royal child in chapter 7 and appears to come from the same historical period. Beginning with a vision of victory it describes the restoration of Israel as the work of Yahweh, faithful to His covenant promises that a descendant of David would, in the end of days, reign over a kingdom in which peace and justice had silenced the tumult of battle.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
light has shone upon those who dwelt
in a land of deep darkness.
You have multiplied the nation
and increased joy;

they rejoice before you
as in the harvest merrymaking,
as men rejoice when dividing the spoil.
For their burdensome yoke,
the staff on their shoulder,
the rod of their oppressor
you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior,
every cloak rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us;
government shall be upon his shoulder,
and he will be named
Wonderful Counsellor, God-Hero,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government
and of peace
there will be no end,
upon David's throne, and over his kingdom,
to establish and uphold it
with judgment and justice,
from this time forth and forever.
The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will do this.

(Isaiah 9, 1-6)

The prophet Jeremiah, writing over a century later and in a time of national peril, offered a similar vision of a Davidic king who should rule so wisely and justly that his name would be called *Yahweh-sidheqenu* (Yahweh our justice, or vindication). It seems to be more than pure coincidence that the successor of David, who actually occupied the throne of Judah at the critical moment when Jerusalem fell in 587 B.C., bore the name of Zedekiah, etymologically identical with the name given by Jeremiah to the Messianic king of the future.

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh,
when I will raise up for David
a righteous branch;

he shall reign as king and rule wisely;
he shall do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah shall be saved,
and Israel shall dwell securely.
This is the name they will give him:
"Yahweh our justice" (Jeremiah 23, 5-6).

The passages we have quoted are but a few samplings of the royal Messianic hope which prophet and psalmist kept alive, even in Israel's moments of agony. All of these spokesmen of Yahweh have this in common, their assurance that God would remain faithful to the promises He had made to David's house. They were certain that, eventually, a Davidic king, endowed with the gifts of the spirit and strong with the power of Yahweh, would perfectly fulfill the ideal which had been but imperfectly realized in David and his historical descendants. Once the Babylonian captivity and the return to Zion under Persian rule had put an end to kingship in Israel, other forms of the Messianic hope came to the fore, but the people never lost hope in a future ruler who would establish Yahweh's rule over the world.

The New Testament offers its own witness to this enduring hope. Saint Paul speaks of the Gospel of God's Son, born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Romans 1, 3). It is quite possible that this description of our Lord is an excerpt from one of the early credal formulas recited by the Christians. The Synoptic Gospels provide the most extensive evidence for the Davidic form of the Messianic hope. They report the cry "Son of David" on the lips of the blind Bartimaeus as well as the witness of the multitudes shouting their Hosannas to the Son of David at the triumphant Messianic entry into Jerusalem. As might be expected, Matthew, who writes the most Jewish of the Gospels, shows a special interest in our Lord's designation as the Son of David.

One passage in the Gospels (Mark 12, 35-37, with parallels in Matthew and Luke) has caused some difficulty over the application of the Messianic title to Jesus. While instructing the

people in the Temple area Jesus, alluding to the 110th Psalm, put to them the question, "How do the scribes say that the Christ [Messiah] is the Son of David?" Some have interpreted the words of Jesus in this episode as a denial of Davidic sonship. But it emphatically is neither a disavowal of His Davidic origin nor a petty exegetical quibble. Far from denying the title, our Lord implies unmistakably that He is infinitely more than David's son. As He had done with other Old Testament titles, so here, He strives to widen the accepted notion of the Son of David. What it comes down to is the simple truth that the title Son of David is not, of itself, adequate to describe His Person and work. The incident provides us with one of those brief and illuminating flashes of revelation by means of which our Lord occasionally drew aside the veil of mystery surrounding His personality. We might well concede that the title Son of David was not the dominant element in His self-revelation. But the title underscored an important link with the ancient hope of His people, longing for that leader who would inaugurate the promised reign of peace and justice and thus establish the Kingdom of God.

The Son of Man

Our Lord preferred to use the title Son of Man in speaking of Himself. The phrase occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels but we shall confine our attention to the witness of Mark. In this Gospel it appears in no less than fourteen sayings of Jesus. That He used the title Son of Man in different senses is not open to question. Sometimes the title bears a present Messianic sense, as in 2, 10-28; at other times it is used to describe the future Messianic dignity of our Lord at His Second Coming, as in 8, 38; 13, 26, and 14, 62 (which we shall see later); often enough the title appears in prophecies announcing His suffering, death and resurrection, as in 8, 31; 9, 9; 12, 31; 10, 33f. 45; 14, 21 (twice). 41.

There have been scholars who doubted that Jesus ever attributed the title Son of Man to Himself. Their position is that the

phrase was a creation of the primitive Christian community which then put the title on the lips of Jesus. But the Gospel tradition is absolutely opposed to such a view and the virtual silence on the use of the title in theological writings of the Apostolic Age makes it practically incredible that it should have been an invention of Jesus' followers.

We have, therefore, no doubt that the Son of Man passages represent authentic sayings of Jesus. May it not be possible, moreover, that this title, paradoxical as it is in the use made of the title by our Lord, can tell us more about the mystery of His Person than, for example, the title Son of God? We have already noted that occasionally Son of Man is used to indicate the humble state of Christ the Man who was rejected by His own and was destined for suffering and death. But there are other texts, noted above, where no such explanation will fit the use of this title. In these cases the Son of Man is associated with a figure who has a glorious and transcendent destiny. Jesus speaks of Himself as one who will come on the clouds with great power and glory.

Perhaps the best single example of His identification of Himself with this glorified figure who is to come may be found in the dramatic encounter between Jesus and Caiphas before the Sanhedrin.

Then the High Priest, rising and going to the center, questioned Jesus: "Do you make no reply to the evidence these men have given against you?" But He kept silence and answered not a word. Once more the High Priest questioned Him: "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said: "I am. Moreover you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14, 60-62).

Challenged by the official representative of Israel, the answer of Jesus was direct and unequivocal. He is the Messiah. Then He went further by predicting that the glorious destiny of the

Messiah, as foreshadowed in Psalm 110, and especially in Daniel 7, would be fulfilled in Him. The reference to Daniel, which is part of a vast and impressive vision of the prophet, is of special importance in providing the background for our Lord's solemn declaration at His trial.

In visions of the night I saw,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
to the Ancient of Days he came
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting one,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7, 13-14).

In this passage the title Son of Man is given for the first time to one who will appear in the final period, *i.e.*, to an eschatological figure. The Son of Man reference could, indeed, be interpreted either as a symbol for "the saints of the Most High" (collective meaning) or as the representative of the elect community (individual meaning). It could even be understood of both! One sometimes hears the objection that the Son of Man as depicted in Daniel 7 is not a true individual but a group. But this is not a valid objection; for our Lord was very much aware that in His life and work of redemption He relived the religious experience of Israel and that, as the New Israel, obedient to the Father, He fulfilled representatively the promises and destiny of the ancient people of God. And this is precisely how the Evangelists understood His Person and mission.

The Son of Man theme reappears in later Jewish tradition, especially in the work entitled the *Similitudes of Enoch*, where the individuality, pre-existence, and superhuman character of the

heavenly figure are emphatically affirmed. By the time of our Lord, then, we have in both canonical and noncanonical writings witness to belief in the Son of Man who would receive dominion by a direct and sovereign intervention of God. This title furnished a new form and substance for the hope cherished by God's people.

The Jewish people had suffered much in the two centuries before the coming of Christ. Foes on all sides made this an anxious time, when faith was tested and when peace and security never seemed further away. They longed for one who could assure the victory of right over evil and the victory of God's sovereignty over the naked power of the world. Even beyond this, they hoped for a savior who could conquer the more insidious power of sin while he brought a holy and transcendent God near to sinful and suffering men. In the bitterness of national humiliation Israel again learned that salvation could never come from military weapons or political alliances, or any other human means. It was necessary for God to intervene in her history as He had many centuries before. Only Jesus could answer such a divinely-directed longing and expectation.

The Suffering Servant

In our consideration of the forms taken by personal Messianism we have already seen two, the Davidic Messiah and the Son of Man. We noted above, however, that the title Son of Man is sometimes used by Jesus when He is alluding to His vocation of humiliation and suffering. He has extended and enriched the notion of the Son of Man, the exalted heavenly being who receives dominion, by combining this idea with another Old Testament figure. This is the mysterious figure of the Suffering Servant. It is in the fourth of the Servant Songs that we have the clearest portrait of the innocent sufferer whose self-oblation brings redemption to all. This Fourth Song is one of the highest peaks of Old Testament theology and opens up a magnificent vision of redemptive suffering and ultimate glory.

Behold, my servant shall prosper,
he shall be greatly exalted, lifted up
and set on high.

As many were appalled at (him) . . .
I have so altered his aspect from the rest of men,
his form from that of the sons of men.

So shall he startle many nations,
kings shall stand aghast at him.

For things untold shall they have seen,
and things unheard shall they have understood.

Who has believed our report?

To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?

As a young plant he grew up before him,
like a root out of thirsty soil.

He had neither form nor comeliness
that we should look upon him,
nor beauty that we should delight in him.

He was despised and forsaken of men,
a man of pains and acquainted with wounds,
as one from whom men hide their faces,
he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Truly he bore our wounds,
our pains he made his burden,
and we esteemed him as one smitten,
struck down by God and afflicted.

Yet he was wounded for our sins,
crushed by our iniquities.

The chastisement of our peace was upon him,
and by his stripes we were healed.

All of us had gone astray like sheep,
each had followed his own way,
but Yahweh fastened upon him
the iniquity of us all.

Though oppressed he submitted
and opened not his mouth,
like a lamb led to the slaughter,
like a sheep dumb before his shearers,
for he opened not his mouth.

By a coerced sentence he was taken away,
and who concerned himself with his lot?

For he was cut off from the land of the living,
smitten (to death) by the sin of my people.
With the wicked they buried him,
his tomb was with the corrupt,
though violence he had not committed,
nor was deceit on his lips.
But Yahweh was pleased to crush him with suffering;
truly he offered his life as a guilt-offering.
He shall see a posterity, he shall enjoy
length of days,
the good pleasure of Yahweh
shall prosper at his hand.
After life's sorrow he shall see light and be satisfied.
By his knowledge shall my servant justify many,
and their sins he shall bear.
Therefore I shall apportion him many,
the multitudes shall he receive as booty.
Because he poured out his soul in death
and with sinners was he numbered;
since he bore the sin of many, and for sinners
he made entreaty (Isaiah 52, 13—53, 12).

The two themes, Son of Man and Suffering Servant, have been creatively joined in one Person in the New Testament. If we ask how the fusion came about it will not do to say that this was the work of the primitive Christian community. Aside from the fact that communities as such are rather sterile media for coming up with new ideas and visions, it is next to impossible to imagine the early community, without the authorization of Him who was the only reason for its existence, creatively combining concepts so diverse as the Son of Man and Suffering Servant. Psychological probability has its limits and we cannot get around the fact that it was the task of the first Christians to *preach* the Good News—not create it.

The fusion of the two ideas, Son of Man and Suffering Servant, in the person of the Messiah is both novel and paradoxical. That this combination of themes was altogether new and extremely difficult to accept is strikingly attested by the reaction

of the disciples who openly expressed their shock and scandal at the thought of a suffering Messiah. We are not in a position to know precisely what sort of a Messianic ideal the disciples had formed, nor the extent to which it might have been influenced by nationalistic hopes. But it does not seem that their ideal had any place for the unique synthesis revealed to them by our Lord when He combined the ideal of the Suffering Servant with the apocalyptic Son of Man.

When we add to this new revelation the Savior's prediction that the disciples would have to share the suffering of their Master, it is any wonder that they found this a hard teaching or that they were very slow to grasp its profound significance? Only the actual events themselves, His passion, death, and resurrection, coupled with the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost would bring the light necessary to comprehend this shattering truth. Through the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit and prolonged reflection upon the total mystery of Christ, the early Christians came to see that through His death and resurrection the Messiah, their Lord, achieved His glorification and their own. Far from diminishing their hope, suffering could then take on a new meaning for them, the New Israel, called to share in the world mission of the Suffering Servant, in whose submission lay His victory.

Conclusion

We have looked at some of the forms in which Israel's hope found expression and considered the manner in which this hope was realized in the Person of Christ. Needless to say, we have not exhausted the Messianic theme, which is made up of many strands. In a certain sense we can say that the whole Old Testament is Messianic in that it tells the story of Israel's hopes and destiny which found their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. It is not a question of this or that text which we can apply to Him; the entire revelation of the Old Testament creates the climate of preparation, of longing for one who could give final meaning

to the divine plan in history. To put it another way, we might say that the Old Testament points to Christ; it does not describe Him in detail.

It was obviously impossible to describe all the perspectives which the Old Testament opens up in its preparation for the Messiah. But enough has been given, I believe, to show that Jesus has not only fulfilled what was promised but has done so in such a way as to give the promises a new and deeper significance. He has neither set them aside nor distorted their original meaning but has integrated them in a richer and more comprehensive synthesis than was foreseen before He came into our world.

The difference between preparation and fulfillment is a very great one. And if the New Testament looks back constantly to the Old as to its point of departure it never forgets that this revelation was incomplete and imperfect. Ancient Israel laid the groundwork for New Testament revelation but builders were needed to finish the structure. The Old Testament told a story that needed a last chapter. It opened perspectives and awakened hopes that could not be realized in its own time. The problems it raises are still unresolved when the Old Testament ends, and the old wineskins are incapable of holding the new wine of Christian revelation.

All this must be said without showing an attitude of condescension to the Old Testament or underestimating its value as the teacher leading to Christ. Discard the Old Testament and it is impossible to understand adequately the significance of Christ to whom it points with all its dynamism. Conversely, the Old Testament, with its vast potentialities and expectations, receives final meaning from the New Testament.

There are many today who live without hope or who cling to hopes that are illusory, such as a naïve optimism about our capacity for saving ourselves. The Old Testament demolishes that kind of an illusion for it knew man's inclination to evil and his total dependence upon God for salvation. Besides those with-

out hope there are others uncertain about the very meaning of existence. Cramped within the prison of the present they have no vision of the future and its promises. The oppressive anxieties of our modern world and fears arising from man's frightful new powers of self-destruction have hemmed many into a world which does not rise above the things which are seen. The danger really lies in the power of the world to focus man's attention exclusively on its concerns while shutting out from life every supernatural dimension. Where there is no belief in the supernatural we will find neither vision nor hope—at least as they are understood in the Old and New Testaments.

The Church offers no new and easy cures for the despair that warps so many lives. Her strength does not consist in ready-made solutions. Faithful to her biblical tradition, the Church offers the fulfilled hope of Israel. This hope was realized in a Person who, as the Victim of sin, became the Victor over sin, as foreshadowed in the Suffering Servant theme. Through His victory we may now become living members of the New Israel and share in the New Covenant, announced long ago by Jeremiah. It is to these supernatural realities that the Church invites a world desperately in need of hope. This is, of course, an ancient invitation for, like the first preachers of the word, we have no right to proclaim any other hope than one which is grounded upon Christ, the hope of Israel.

STUDY-CLUB QUESTIONS

Basis of the Messianic Hope

1. How did the people of Israel view history? In what way did Israel have a special role in the history of salvation?
2. When do we get the first hint of God's plan for redemption?
3. What was the role of Abraham in the Messianic pattern?
4. Why is the Exodus so important in the history of Israel?
5. Why did the Israelites look "both backward and forward"? Why do Christians also do this?

The Forms of Israelite Hope

1. What is the meaning of the word "Messiah"? What is its significance in Israelite history? For Christians?
2. In what ways was the Messianic hope open to misinterpretation and misuse?
3. What distinctions are there between the Hebrew and the Christian understanding of the word "Messiah"?
4. Is the Messiah fully and completely described in the prophecies of the Old Testament? Explain.
5. In what sense is the *whole* of the Old Testament Messianic?

The Day of Yahweh

1. What is meant by the expression "Day of Yahweh"?
2. In what way did the Israelites forget that being the Chosen People involved obligations as well as rights?
3. In what way could the coming of the Messiah be considered a judgment as well as a blessing? What did the prophet Amos have to say about this? The prophet Joel?
4. How did the prophet known as Second Isaiah view the coming of the Messiah?
5. Why did the prophets sometimes use imagery that might be taken to suggest material blessings alone in connection with the Day of Yahweh?

The Messianic King

1. How did the Messiah come to be regarded as a kind of king?
2. In what way were the descendants of David the visible bearers, however unworthy in themselves, of the Messianic hope?
3. How did the prophet Isaiah describe the Messiah?
4. How did Jeremiah continue the idea of the Messiah as a king?
5. Why did our Lord try to widen the notion of the Son of David?

The Son of Man

1. In what connection did Jesus most frequently refer to Himself as the Son of Man?
2. What similarity is there between Jesus' words to Caiphas and Daniel's prophecy about the "son of man"?
3. In what non-biblical Jewish work was the idea of the Son of Man who was to dominate the whole world reaffirmed?
4. What happened during the last two centuries before Christ that made the Jewish people even more anxious than ever for the coming of the Messiah?
5. Did our Lord use the title "Son of Man" in only one sense? Explain.

The Suffering Servant

1. How does the fourth of the Servant Songs portray the Messiah?
2. In what way did the themes of Son of Man and Suffering Servant differ? How were they united in Christ?
3. Why did Jesus' disciples have so much difficulty understanding the idea of a suffering Messiah?
4. Did the followers of Jesus ever fully understand His teaching about His own and their suffering during the time that Christ was with them?
5. What was the importance of Pentecost in connection with the coming of the Messiah, the full understanding of His nature and mission and what was required of those who wished to follow Him?

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